ORPHEUS TWICE
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The “ghost of an image” is an expression used by the English artist John Stezaker to describe the process by which images disappear, travel across time, and rematerialize. It’s a suitable subtitle for Orpheus Twice, an exhibition investigating image and absence.

This project was nourished by sources as diverse as the problematic and hotly debated restoration two years ago of Leonardo da Vinci’s The Virgin and Child with St. Anne; Laurence Giavarini’s essay on a painting by Nicolas Poussin; and Jakuta Alikavazovic’s recent novel The Blond and the Bunker.

Often in these sources, the mythological couple of Orpheus and Eurydice appears as a metaphor for the act of seeing and creating. The story is well known. At her wedding, while trying to escape from a satyr, Eurydice suffered a fatal snake bite to her heel. Her body was discovered by Orpheus who, overcome with grief, played such sad and mournful songs that all the nymphs and gods wept. On their advice, Orpheus travelled to the underworld where his music softened the hearts of Hades and Persephone, who agreed to allow Eurydice to return with him to earth on one condition: on his way back, he must walk in front of her and not look back until they had both reached the upper world. He set off with Eurydice following, but on their way he turned to look at her. She vanished again, this time forever.

Many renditions and interpretations of the myth exist. One of these focuses less on the existential and sentimental aspects of the story than on its metaphorical definition of artistic inspiration. In an essay, from 1955, entitled The Gaze of Orpheus, the French author and theorist Maurice Blanchot writes: “[Eurydice] is the profoundly dark point towards which art, desire, death, and the night all seem to lead”.

And indeed, for art critic Elizabeth Manchester, “The figure of Orpheus stands as a central pillar to John’s work. Orpheus bringing his wife Eurydice from the underworld into the light of day, and then losing her, is an allegory for the artist’s attempt to move the image out of obscurity into light, to make conscious the unconscious, to give expression to the inapprehensible, a goal that is ultimately doomed since by its very nature that which is inapprehensible cannot be consciously apprehended”.

The images in Orpheus Twice have had previous lives; they are ghosts. Which is to say most of the artworks in the exhibition draw on pre-existing source material and images, from a picture of an iconic wool wedding dress designed by Yves Saint Laurent in 1965 (Yves Saint Laurent and a Shadow of My Hair by Juliette Blightman, in Gallery 1) to the Statue of Liberty (We the People by Danh Vo, in Gallery 3) to Modernist post war painting (acrylics by Rodney Graham, in Gallery 5). John Stezaker again: “I didn’t want to be involved with the currency of images in any way. […] I was interested in the obsolescence of images, the point at which they become illegible, mysterious, at which they touch on another world. […] I do like the idea of the image initiating a return”.

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Images live a second life, stuck in a temporal ambiguity. When Rodney Graham restages a certain lineage in the history of modern art, his paintings are images of paintings. If they seem like paintings in a vintage style, the freshness of their surface and frame creates a lacuna that makes them indecipherable.

The link between loss and photography has been explored in depth by Roland Barthes in his book *Camera Lucida*, written while he was mourning the death of his mother. For Barthes, the essence of photography is in its ghostly evocation of death in life, “The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent...the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star”. 5 That becomes particularly clear in the photographs of temporary, floating or wind sculptures from 1967 by Bruce McLean. Created as a critical comment on traditional academic sculptures, these works — part performances, part objects — can only exist through photographic documentation: they are, from their conception, conceived as an inevitable loss.

But loss and death haunt the exhibition not only through photographs. Failed relationships and the end of love form the basis of Katrina Palmer’s sound piece *Ex*, from 2012 (Gallery 1), itself an invisible work using literary images. The dead bird in *Rose Tourmaline Inside an Owl* by Jason Dodge (Gallery 2) is a corpse, an object, and a sculpture. When coupled to a title, it becomes a mental and symbolic image, as do the light-producing objects removed from the house in Lithuania (Gallery 2), or the dead flowers in Rodney Graham’s studio (Gallery 5). The work by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Orpheus, Twice)* from 1991 (Gallery 3), was conceived shortly after the death of the artist’s partner. The two mirrors stand as a symbolic passageway to another—false—reality. Figures of separation, they can only reflect the surrounding void or a solitary figure.

In his book *Devant le temps* (2000), art historian and philosopher George Didi-Huberman proposes a definition for the image. He starts from Walter Benjamin’s concept of aura as a phenomenon originating from the image: incomplete and forever “open”. The dynamic principle generating the aura is a dialectic of desire, which implies an otherness, a lost object, a divided subject. The aura is what “works” in and through the image, what energizes the image and turns it into an active process. Didi-Huberman speaks about this active process in Barnett Newman’s abstract paintings. An image differs from

a picture; an image doesn’t illustrate. It can be abstract, even invisible.

Another important distinction that defines the image is its temporal ambiguity: the past resurfaces in the now, in a constant disjunction and reactivation of the present-ness of the past. Art historian Laurence Giovanini writes, in an essay on Poussin’s *Landscape with Orphée and Eurydice* (c. 1650): “Every image has its shadow, its ghost, [...] as well as every image is the shadow of an image to come”. 6 Such temporal indecision naturally includes the future, in a process akin to what philosophers Gilles Deleuze (“the crystal image”, an intertwining of the real and the imaginary, the actual and the virtual) and Jacques Derrida speak of in connection to cinema. Cinema is a succession of printed photograms projected onto a screen. Each photogram must disappear for the next one to appear and for the impression of movement to be achieved. Because of this constant disappearance/appearance, Derrida describes the cinematographic image as an “experience of spectrality” 7: each image, like a ghost, has an ambiguous relation to time.

This is why artists turn to cinema as an image source and a structural process. In *Recalling Frames* from 2010 (Gallery 4), David Maljkovic superimposes contemporary photographs onto stills from a 1962 film by Orson Wells. Marcel Broodthaers creates a poster and storyboard for a non-existent film, *Ein Eisenbahnüberfall* from 1972 (Gallery 2), and interrogates cinema in his slide show *Bateau Tableau* (1973). John Stezaker is particularly well known for his use of old publicity shots in collages (*Dark Star XIX, Mask XLVIII*, etc.). Rodney Graham, meanwhile, borrows images directly from film—here, from an early Alfred Hitchcock feature for the piece *Sunday Sun, 1937*—or uses cinematic devices to recreate images (the 1930s prairie-town photo lab in *Basement Camera Shop*) in Gallery 5.

The image’s temporal ambiguity corresponds to the ambiguous status of the object itself. Are we looking at a hyperrealist painting or a video, and what exactly belongs to the installation in Gallery 2? That piece in Gallery 2, is it a painting, a series of photographs, a “lecture on the history of painterly modernism”, an “autopsy of a painting” 8, or a project for a film? How should we approach the Danh Vo piece in Gallery 3? As an autonomous sculpture, a fragment of an achieved project, or an on-going process? Is it an enlarged photograph, a sculpture, or a film still we see in Gallery 5? Mirrors and

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6 Ibidem


a fragment of an achieved project, or an on-going process? Is it an enlarged photograph, a sculpture, or a film still we see in Gallery 5? Mirrors and mirroring effects are another way to play with ambiguity. They can reverse, duplicate, or complicate what’s inside the frame (Juliette Blightman, John Stezaker) — or outside it (Felix Gonzalez-Torres, David Maljkovic). Parody, too, is kind of duplicated reality, doubling and distorting the original in a play of identity and authorship (Rodney Graham, Bruce McLean, Marcel Broodthaers).

Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy speaks of the “monstrosity” of the image. In his definition, the image is always uncommon, manifesting itself not as appearance, but as exhibition or revelation. This is why, according to him, every image is at “the verge of cruelty”; it is a representation not an illustration. Nancy uses the word ‘representation’ in its theatrical sense, interpreting the Latin prefix “re-” not as a repetition (presenting again) but as an intensifier (presenting more). That is, a representation is not a repeat presentation, it’s a better one — a presence exhibited. In banishing the notion of illustration from the realm of representation, he (like Didi-Huberman) opens the possibility for an image with nothing to illustrate.

The void that defines the image is doubled: it’s there in the physical absence of the represented object, and as an absence in the representing object. The latter, the absence found in the image itself is what Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges is referring to when he writes: “This imminent revelation which never happens, may be that is the aesthetic act”. The necessary void and frustration of the non-revelation open a space for individual freedom and imagination: An image is what can be imagined and how to imagine it. Or as Julia Kristeva said of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “Beauty emerges as the admirable face of loss”.

Vincent Honoré

Courtesy the artist and The Approach Gallery, London

Courtesy VW, Berlin
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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David Maljkovic, *Recalling Frames*, 2010
Courtesy the artist and Sprueth Magers, London
NOTES ON THE ARTISTS

Merging installation and performance, British artist Juliette Blightman (b. 1980) makes subtle spatial interventions by introducing and arranging personal objects or otherwise altering the features of the gallery to reveal the contradictory and subjective nature of time. For *Orpheus Twice*, she creates an in-situ installation and a new performance in October.

The artistic output of Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers (1924-1976) comprised diverse practices and media: installation, film, and sculpture. For this artist, who began his career as a poet, the symbolic charge of images as well as their linguistic and structural qualities were crucial. Broodthaers felt that there was a disconnect between poetry and images and that the predominate modes of representation had fossilized the art of his time. Challenging these conventions humorously, yet self-consciously, he produced works renowned for heralding what is known today as institutional critique. On display here will be some rarely seen works, from 1972 and 1973, which focus on the disappearance of the image and its author.

American artist Jason Dodge (b. 1969) alters or decontextualizes mundane objects, providing them with highly nuanced features, often in the form of a narrative system indicated by the title. His sculptures and in-situ installations are not intended, however, to offer fixed or predetermined answers, but, rather, to open up a narrative space from which new questions and unknown interconnections can arise. Exhibited here for the first time in London, the selected works pertain to experiences of loss.

Informed by Minimalism, the installations and sculptural works by the late American, Cuban-born artist Félix González-Torres (1957-1996) provide the spectator with an active role that gives the works their meaning. In so doing, the artist upsets expectations about how specific art practices should articulate ideas and visual content. Highly personal yet objective, his practice, particularly in works such as *Untitled (Orpheus, Twice)*, which lends its title to this exhibition, addresses issues of loss and disappearance.

Canadian artist Rodney Graham (b. 1949) merges scholarship with popular culture. He dissects and examines social and philosophical systems, not in order to recount historically-shaped narratives, but to divert and mislead his audience by means of humour and absurdity. Three lightboxes, created between 2009 and 2012, alongside a group of paintings, are included in the exhibition.

Using various artistic media, David Maljkovic (b. 1973) investigates collective memory and amnesia in the post-communist era. His practice is to interrogate the consequences and impact of particular historical events on contemporary Croatian life. His work consists mainly of images of buildings and other structures erected under Communism, which have since been modified, abandoned or neglected. Juxtaposing the past and the present, he presents an alternative relationship to time in projects such as *Recalling Frames*, from 2010, which is partially re-constituted for this exhibition.

Glaswegian Bruce McLean (b. 1944) abandoned a conventional studio practice in the 1960s, and since then has used ephemeral materials for his sculptural works. His early performance pieces are important records of institutional critique. Mocking and satirizing the art world, they also addressed larger social issues, such as the encroachment of institutionalism and bureaucracy on modern life. We show a group of rarely seen photographs, videos, and books created between 1967 and 1972.

The practice of British artist Katrina Palmer (b. 1969) revolves mainly around writing, recording, and live readings. Her texts and sound pieces are “volumes” to be read as sculptures in a determined space. Typically they involve actors who discuss and interrogate the interplay between tangible material conditions and imaginary sexual actions within fictional real spaces. At DRAF, she presents *Ex*, a sound piece from 2012, which is to be experienced individually by each audience member on portable discman.

Drawing on a personal archive of classic movie stills, vintage postcards and found illustrations, John Stezaker (b. 1949) examines the problematic relationship between image and object, revealing and subverting the complex issues and conflicts present in lens-based images, whether it be their claim to truth and the preservation of memory, or their emblematic status within modern and popular culture.

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Vietnamese-born, Danish artist Danh Vo (b. 1975) uses ready-made objects, with multiple symbolic charge, to reveal complex historical and political relationships. His work interrogates cultural values and identity structures, which he seeks to break down by providing transnational meanings, often interwoven with his own biography. Presented for the first time in a London institution, Vo’s on-going series *We The People*, begun in 2010, reconstitutes the Statue of Liberty on a 1:1 scale.

Bruce McLean, *In the Shadow of Your Smile, Bob*, 1970
Courtesy the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin
OCTOBER AT DRAF

AN EVENING OF PERFORMANCES
17.10.2013 FROM 7 TO 10PM
DRAF and MOUSSE invite you to a special evening of performances, with Juliette Blightman, Michael Dean, Rodney Graham and Florence Peake. More information available on our website: www.davidrobertsartfoundation.com

NOVEMBER AT DRAF

THE HARDER YOU LOOK
20/21/22/23.11.2013
The harder you look is a project in collaboration with Kadist Foundation, Paris and Nomas Foundation, Rome, together with MuHka, SMAK, and MuZee, Belgium, and Pieterd Vermoortel. The harder you look is a temporary institute that takes inspiration and follows the procedures of scientific research as a tool to collaboratively think and produce. It focuses on the various aspects of the context that generates a work and traces back its relation to the viewer. What are the parameters that come into play when looking at a work of art? With Andrea Buttner, Ian Kier, Mark Leckey and many others. More information available on our website: www.davidrobertsartfoundation.com.

DRAF

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The nearest tube station is Mornington Crescent and Camden Town. DRAF is also a short walk from Euston and Warren Street underground stations which are served by the Hammersmith and City, Circle, Bakerloo lines, and Victoria line. DRAF is a 15 minutes walk from Kings Cross St. Pancras.

Busses: 24, 27, 29, 88, 134, 168, 214, 254

OPENING TIMES

Thu - Sat, 12 - 6 pm
Tue - Wed by Appointment

FREE ADMISSION